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RNR 218

CARRIER

BY GILBERT SEDDON

PARIS, OCT 14, REUTER -- A FRENCH NAVAL TASK FORCE LED BY THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER CLEMENCEAU SAILED FOR THE INDIAN OCEAN TODAY TO IMPRESS THE SUPERPOWERS WITH FRANCE'S DETERMINATION TO SAFEGUARD ITS OIL SUPPLY LINES.

THE "POLITIQUE DU PAVILLON" -- SHOW THE FLAG -- MISSION WAS ANNOUNCED BY ADMIRALTY OFFICIALS AS THE SHIPS PREPARED TO LEAVE BREST NAVAL BASE FOR A YEAR'S TOUR.

THE 33,622-TON CLEMENCEAU, CARRYING SQUADRONS OF COMBAT AND RECONNAISSANCE PLANES AND ANTI-SUBMARINE AIRCRAFT, WAS THE FIRST CARRIER SENT ON SUCH A MISSION.

IT WAS ESCORTED BY THE MISSILE FRIGATE TOURVILLE, THE DESTROYER EOUVET AND THE TANKERS LA SACHE AND ABERWRACH.

THE OPERATION, CODE-NAMED SAPHIR, UNDERLINES FRANCE'S BELIEF THAT THE STRATEGIC INDIAN OCEAN SEA LANES, THROUGH WHICH ARAB AND PERSIAN GULF OIL IS TRANSPORTED TO EUROPE, MUST NOT BE CONTROLLED BY THE SOVIET AND AMERICAN FLEETS.

"IF THERE IS ANY THREAT TO OUR COMMUNICATIONS WE MUST BE ABLE TO MEET IT," A SENIOR NAVAL OFFICER SAID.

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CARRIER 2 PARIS

BOTH SUPERPOWERS HAVE TASK FORCES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AND THE RED SEA.

THE SOVIET NAVY, WHICH HAS DOCKING FACILITIES AT ADEN AND OTHER RED SEA HARBORS, IS PUTTING IN APPEARANCES ALL OVER THE INDIAN OCEAN. ONE RUSSIAN FORCE, INCLUDING A CRUISER, DESTROYER AND TANKER, IS DUE TO BEGIN A FRIENDLY VISIT TO MAURITIUS NEXT MONDAY.

THE SOVIET UNION HAS PROTESTED AGAINST AMERICAN USE OF A BRITISH NAVAL BASE AT DIEGO GARCIA IN THE INDIAN OCEAN, WHERE THE U.S. SEVENTH FLEET OPERATES.

WITH THE IMPENDING REOPENING OF THE SUEZ CANAL -- EXPECTED EARLY NEXT YEAR -- GROWING ARAB ECONOMIC POWER AND THE RICH MARKETS THE OIL-PRODUCING COUNTRIES OFFER WESTERN SALESMEN, FRANCE IS ANXIOUS TO LOOK AFTER ITS OWN INTERESTS ON THE TRADING ROUTES.

FRANCE HAS ALREADY CLINCHED SOME SPECTACULAR MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR ARMS AND TECHNOLOGY DEALS WITH SAUDI ARABIA, KUWAIT, ABU DHABI AND IRAN.

REUTER 1534

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